Some figurative language is known as imagery. Figures of speech, such as similes, metaphors, idioms and personification are all examples of imagery. A composer uses imagery in order to link two ideas and to create a vivid or life-like image in their audience's mind. Remember that, as they are figurative, they are not meant to be taken literally.

**Simile**

A simile occurs when a composer compares a subject to another that is not usually linked. Often the word 'like' or 'as' combines the two subjects:

|  |
| --- |
| 'The school students ran around the playground *like* a pack of wild animals'.  'The day was *as* hot *as* beef vindaloo.' |

**Example One**

The best way to find a simile in a text is to ask yourself whether or not two unlike things are being compared. You will need to be able to:

* Recognise a simile
* State what is being compared
* Explain the literal meaning of the simile

Here is an example:

|  |
| --- |
| Tanya waited patiently in line for her ice-cream. The day was very hot and she had run from the house as soon as she heard the familiar tune of the ice-cream van. The soles of her feet were burning but the smooth texture of the vanilla ice-cream was like a cooling breeze, making the wait worthwhile. |

**Text One**

* The simile in text one is '...the vanilla ice-cream was like a cooling breeze'.
* The composer has compared the ice-cream to a breeze. These two things are not usually linked.
* The literal meaning of this simile is that the ice-cream cooled Tanya down.

**Metaphor**

Metaphors are like similes in that two subjects that are not usually linked are linked. Metaphors are different in that, rather than a simple comparison, a metaphor states that the two subjects are the same or equal. The effect of this is to give one object the attributes of the other.

|  |
| --- |
| 'The school students *were* a wild pack of animals'. |

**Example Two**

In this example, the school students are given the attributes of a 'wild pack of animals'. The literal attributes that are being given to the students are that they are noisy and out of control.

In its simplest form, a metaphor uses 'is'

|  |
| --- |
| 'Johnny *is* an ape' |

**Example Three**

While the effect of this is related to a simile, it is important that you can tell the difference between the two.

**Idioms**

Idioms are figurative phrases that are commonly used. Unlike similes and metaphors, there are no rules that define them, other than being figurative. You use idioms all the time without even noticing them. Some include:

*It's raining cats and dogs.*  
**Literally** = cats and dogs are falling from the sky.  
**Figuratively** = It is raining heavily.

*Under the weather.*  
**Literally =** Standing outside.  
**Figuratively =** Not feeling well.

*Head in the sand.*   
**Literally =** Having your head buried in the sand.  
**Figuratively =** Not noticing what is going on around you.

Some idioms are also clichés, which we introduced earlier as a word, phrase or concept that has been used so often that it has lost its impact. It is important to note that while idioms are usually clichés, not all clichés are idioms. The difference is that idioms use figurative language to communicate while clichés are merely commonly used words, phrases or concepts.

**Personification**

Personification is a figure of speech where a composer has given human qualities to an object or animal.

|  |
| --- |
| The old tree is an aged and tired man, Its knobbly fingers tremble, reaching out For its withering brown hat, blown off in the wind. |

**Text two**

The first line is a metaphor. The composer has stated that two objects, a tree and a man, are the same thing. The next two lines give the tree human qualities. The composer has made the trees limbs 'knobbly fingers' and has given the tree a 'brown hat' instead of leaves. These examples of personification help to make the reader empathise with the object.

**Extended Metaphor**

Extend metaphors explore metaphors more deeply. Text two, as well as being an example of personification, is also an extended metaphor. The metaphor is not one line, as with the figure of speech mentioned above, but continues to lines two and three. Having stated that 'the tree is an old man', the composer in text two further explores the ways in which the old man and the tree have similar qualities.

Extended metaphors can be quite long. Text three is an extended metaphor composed by Alfred Lord Tennyson. It compares the leaving of a ship from the Thames (a famous river in London) to life, from birth to death. This is a particularly apt metaphor as ships had to wait until night-time for high tide before they could sail out to sea.

|  |
| --- |
| **CROSSING THE BAR**  Sunset and evening star, And one clear call for me!  And may there be no moaning of the bar, When I put out to sea,  But such a tide as moving seems asleep, Too full for sound and foam,  When that which drew from out the boundless deep Turns again home.  Twilight and evening bell, And after that the dark!  And may there be no sadness of farewell, When I embark;  For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place The flood may bear me far,  I hope to see my Pilot face to face When I have crossed the bar.  ***Alfred, Lord Tennyson* 1809-1892** |